

An Examination of the Ten Commandments

HE WILL GIVE US REST

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

— Exodus 20:8-11

All of our days are to be honoring to God, but one in seven, specifically His day, is to be set apart from all the rest as a Sabbath to the Lord our God. We have seen *who* we are to worship, and *how* we are to worship, and the *reality* of that worship in the power of Christ’s name. This command shows us not only *when* we are to worship, but how to demonstrate our faith in Christ as we worship Him all the time.

This command serves as a summary of this first table of the law—our covenant service to God. It serves a similar function as the last commandment not to covet. Whereas that summary of our relationships with visible creatures gets at the invisible realities of our hearts, this summary speaks to the very tangible matter of how we use our time. The statute requiring us to hallow one day in seven has always been the most practical call to faith. It is the proverbial, “Put your money where your mouth is.” Do you love God? Are you willing to abandon all other hopes for safety, life, satisfaction, and peace? Then lay down your labors and rest in Him.

“For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

— Matthew 12:8

THE LAW REVEALS GOD’S CHARACTER

God is sovereign. He demonstrates to us through His law that He rules and reigns over all creation. There is not a single atom in the Universe over which He does not have control. And the more we see and understand the gospel, the more we realize that that is a good thing. God is not only concerned with our work, but with our rest too. In fact He provides for our rest. All of our toil is meaningless without His establishing the work of our hands.

God starts by modeling good work for us. The Scripture tells us that in six days God created all that there is and then He rested—He paused and enjoyed what He had done. He could delight in what He had made, because it was all good. We serve a God who has created and then rested and who invites us into that rest.

THE LAW SHOWS US WHOM HE HAS MADE US TO BE

We ache. Work is hard. Especially in this fallen world where so many thistles and thorns spring up to mock our labor. This command for holy rest underscores our deficiencies. It shows us our need. Not only do we require physical refreshment, we yearn to be done with the battle against sin.

The Sabbath pattern also reveals our struggle with slavery and our need to have our inheritance returned. The one-in-seven principle applied not only to days, but also to years. At the conclusion of seven seven-year-cycles, slaves were to be set free and family land given up for debts returned. The provision is a gracious caretaking, but it also points us to a final Sabbath after which we can no longer be enslaved or in debt. We were made for freedom and the Sabbath festival is meant to cause us to rejoice in our God who has freed us forever in Christ.

HOW DID CHRIST FULFILL THIS LAW?

He has set us free! He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Our Lord has brought the Year of Jubilee, the final Sabbath when we shall enter His rest. It is all accomplished because Jesus like His Father has accomplished His work and then sat down because it was complete. His proclamation that “the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath” came on the heels of His call, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”¹ The chief doctrine at issue is Christ’s authority to save us from sin.

How we rest says a great deal about *why* we work.

Now we have a foretaste of that heavenly rest when we gather together with His people and worship Him together. Now we know the certainty of the removal of the curse on this creation. Yet, we still labor, and struggle, and die. How can we say that Christ has fulfilled the law of the Sabbath when we cannot yet know the fullness of His rest? This is the demonstration of faith that we participate in as we set apart the Lord’s Day each week as holy unto the Lord.

Christ demonstrated His resurrection body which is the hope of all who follow Him that we too shall be raised. But He also demonstrated Sabbath keeping in that He always and perfectly kept the Law. His temptation is finished and He is returned to glory at the right hand of His Father. This is our Sabbath hope as well. For we too will be changed. Not only transported and transformed to glory, but made unable to sin against the God whom we love. Our battle with sin has been won and we will know a Sabbath rest when we feel its evil effects never again. Praise be to our Great God!

“The gospel produces rest; restlessness is always a sign of unbelief.”

— Jack Miller

WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM (WSC) vs. HEIDELBERG CATECHISM (HC)

WSC 60. How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

HC 103 What is God’s will for you in the fourth commandment?

First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I regularly attend the assembly of God’s people to learn what God teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings to the poor. Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through His Spirit, and so begin already in this life the eternal Sabbath.

APPLICATION

What does it mean for us to keep the Sabbath? This is not a minor issue for Christians. What issues of faith does Sabbath observance raise for you? What do you need to trust God in to rightly obey Him in this? What is the difference between legalism and faithfulness in this? How does our keeping of this law demonstrate our keeping of the first three commands as well? What are the practical, visible ways that our rest in Christ give evidence to the love for Him that God has set within our hearts? God’s people are to be a Sabbath-keeping people. What would that look like in Portland, Maine?

¹ Matthew 11:28-12:8